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Affirmation

'Reconciling' Movements Meet

The leaders of five programs advocating the full participation of lesbians and gay men in mainstream religious denominations met for the first time Oct. 26-28 in New York.

According to Mark Bowman, coordinator of the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP), nine participants—representing more than 200 local congregations—discussed joys and frustrations as well as ways they could support one another.

The participants agreed to cooperate on:

- development of educational materials for congregations
- designation of an interdenominational "Reconciling Day of Worship"
- collaboration on Open Hands, the journal of the RCP
- organization of a national assembly of local churches that officially welcome lesbians and gay men.

The programs differ in the way they relate to their denominations. Two of the reconciling movements enjoy official recognition within their respective churches. Both the Unitarian Universalist Association's Welcoming Congregation Program and the Open and Affirming Program have received official recognition and support. The Presbyterian-related More Light Program and the Lutheran-related Reconciled-in-Christ Program, like their United Methodist counterpart, the Reconciling Congregations Program, receive no support from their denominations.

Currently the Reconciling Congregations Program consists of 46 local United Methodist churches, four annual conferences, and several United Methodist organizations.

(*Article prepared from UMNS release, Linda Bloom, reporter)

Commission Takes Stand: Finds Unity in Baptism

The United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (CCUIC) has declared itself a "reconciling commission" and as such is open "to the full participation of all people, including gay men and lesbians." This resolution was passed at the Commission's Fall meeting in New York City, October 14-17.

As rationale for its action, the 42-member commission said "through Baptism God has made us members of one Body of Christ and this is our basic bond of unity." Also cited was the commitment expressed in the *Book of Discipline* (Par. 71f) to be, on the basis of the unity of baptism, "in ministry for and with all persons." The resolution also cited the commission's responsibility "to work for unity in the church and renewal of the wholeness in creation," said the resolution.

The possibility of the CCUIC's becoming a reconciling commission first came up last spring and was referred to agency's unity and wholeness committee, headed by Joseph Agne of Chicago. The vote at the New York meeting came after several hours of discussion. An effort to include a statement in the resolution encouraging dialogue between those who support reconciling congregations and those who do not was defeated.

Bishops who are members of the commission expressed the view that the resolution of the commission does not violate the disciplinary provisions which prohibits church boards and agencies from "advocating homosexuality."

The resolution specifically states that the members of CCUIC hold "diverse opinions regarding homosexuality and the Christian faith" but pledged to encourage "respect, dialogue, witness, learning and growth in mutual compassion toward that unity" of baptism.

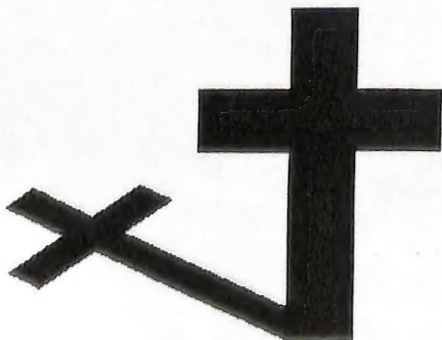
"As baptized persons we belong to each other," summarized Mr. Agne. "Passage of the resolution gives us a chance to discuss what this means."

(*Article prepared from UMNS release, Francis Smith, reporter)

Happenings in the Church

(taken from denominational news releases)

- John R. Silber, president of United Methodist-related Boston University, was defeated in his bid to become Governor of Massachusetts. Silber's anti-gay and conservative stances caused the unprecedented situation of major lesbian and gay political organizations in Massachusetts endorsing a (liberal) republican.
- The United Methodist National Youth Ministry Organization (NYMO) has given more than \$8000 to support two independently produced videos that address AIDS from a youth perspective.
- The Interagency Task Force on AIDS Ministries has challenged United Methodist agencies to adopt personnel policies to protect the rights of persons with AIDS and those who are HIV-positive. The task force is also proposing changes to the *Book of Discipline* that will ensure protection for persons with AIDS.
- The Judicial Council has referred to the 1992 General Conference the issue of whether church law permits alternative terms for referring to the deity in official church publications. This would include widely used inclusive language terms such as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer" rather than the more traditional "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."
- Choirs in United Methodism wanting to sing during the 1992 General Conference in Louisville, KY, must submit audition tapes and biographical data to Carolyn Hopkins, [redacted] Cairo, GA [redacted] by Jan. 31, 1991. National Affirmation has submitted tapes for several General Conferences and encourages local groups and reconciling congregations to let their voices be heard.
- In other denominations - U.S. Catholic Bishops have recently issued a statement acknowledging that homosexuality is not in and of itself a sin. However, they call upon lesbian and gay Catholics to refrain from same-sex activities and to remain celibate.



Lifeline: News from Local Groups

- Los Angeles held its regular monthly meeting November 7th with the showing of the video, "A Time for Caring." They also held a Thanksgiving Day dinner.
- Dallas with its usual full schedule held an All Saints Day Service on October 29th and went camping at Lake Murray State Park.
- Tarrant County held a joint social with Dignity and its Affirmation/Parent Group (Dallas).

Want to see your group's name in the news? Be sure to send your newsletter or news items to Fritz at [redacted] San Francisco, CA [redacted]

Council Highlights

The Affirmation Council met for the first time on September 16, 1990 following the Fall National Meeting in Washington, DC. A significant portion of the meeting centered on orientation and management of the transition to the new governing structures.

Highlights of actions taken by the Council are as follows:

- **Initial preparations for the 1992 General Conference.** A logistics committee was reconfirmed to work with the Reconciling Congregations Program in locating suitable hotel accommodations and other arrangements. The Affirmation Platform Statement will be made available to those interested in Affirmation's positions on various issues.
- **Postponement of Council Leadership selection until the January 1991 meeting.** Leadership roles are currently being filled on an interim basis until January. During the transition, Roger Kruse is serving as Financial Manager, Jim Scurlock as Task Administrator, and Randy Miller as Spokesperson.
- **Set aside portion of next meeting for visioning.** The Council will spend a significant portion of its next meeting discussing the role of the Council in the new structure and discerning goals and directions for the organization as a whole.

The next meeting of the Affirmation Council will be in Washington, DC, January 18-21, 1991.

Speaking/Out:

Is It Time to Act Up Yet?

Maybe. General Conference is still more than a year and a half away, but already I catch myself looking queasily south- and eastward to where I imagine Louisville to be. The very thought of General Conference generates all the excitement and anticipation of a dentist appointment: "Gee, that time of year again? I thought I took care of all those things last time."

When I was a youth and more active in church affairs, I dreamed of the day when I would attend General Conference to participate in the great deliberations and decisions of the United Methodist Church. "Be careful what you wish for," an old saying goes, "it just may come true." In my case it has come true with a vengeance.

Speaking collectively, we, by virtue of our sexual orientations or by our support of those who are lesbian and gay, have made it to General Conference. Indeed, we have been at the very center of the great deliberations and decision-making of the church for at least three consecutive General Conferences. What is more, the report of the Study Committee on Homosexuality ensures us at least one more encore performance in Louisville, Kentucky. We've made it.

But it would be a terrible mistake to confuse our status at General Conference with that of the *invited guests*. That simply is not the case. Each successive General Conference, it can be argued, has imposed more restrictions on the inclusion of lesbian and gay men and achieved the net effect of making the church appear to be more and more inhospitable to those with progressive leanings.

So is it time to Act Up yet? Maybe. But before we pull out all the stops, perhaps we should spend some time between now and GC Day 1992 discussing exactly what it is we want or expect from the General Conference. What is it

that impels us to continue our presence at General Conference?

Do we want reparations for the Church's sins against lesbians and gay men accumulated over the centuries? Do we want the opportunity to exact a kind of communal vengeance on a captive audience? Or conversely, is it the Church's blessing that we seek. Do we want to finally wrest a benediction from an all-powerful institution? Be careful what you wish for, it just may come true.

For some time now when asked what it is that Affirmation wants from the Church, I have responded that what we demand is that the United Methodist Church embrace and celebrate the full vision of lesbian and gay Christians bringing all that we are and all of our gifts, talents, and graces to an *uncommon* fellowship.

To settle for anything less than this would be like Jacob in the Old Testament story selling his birthright for a bowl of soup - an uneven exchange at best.

Or to reuse a metaphor from an earlier point, we need to remind our friends and enemies alike in the Church that not only are we *invited guests* at God's banquet, but since the very beginning we have been some of the best cooks. Indeed, it may be that God is inviting the larger church to the banquet that we have prepared. Stranger things have happened.

Is it time to Act Up yet? I have a wonderful, recurring daydream about busing in thousands of lesbians and gay men to the 1992 General Conference. During the plenary sessions, we would simply begin to dance, as if our lives depended on it - slowly at first and then with more abandon. "Bringing our deep joy to the world's deep need," as Frederick Buechner says. Surely some of the delegates would join in and maybe a bishop or two would begin to vogue. And in the dance would be sensuality, spirit, anger, healing, joy...

What are your hopes and fears for General Conference 1992? It's time to start talking about those now.

— Randy Miller

Members-At-Large Elected

Nine members-at-large were elected to the new Affirmation Council during the Fall 1990 National Meeting in Washington, DC. Members-at-large are nominated by committee and confirmed by the Affirmation membership in an effort to be inclusive of women, people of color, geographic diversity and specific skills and experience.

The selection of members-at-large brings the total membership of the Council to twenty people. Of this total figure: eight (8) members are women and two are persons of color. In addition, five (5) persons are from the Northeast Jurisdiction; two (2) from the Southeast; two (2) from North Central; three (3) from South Cen-

tral, seven (7) from Western, and one from Canada.

The complete roster of the Council is as follows:

Members-At-Large:*

| | | |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| Roger Kruse | George Hodgdon | Peggy Gaylord |
| Joanne Brown | Randy Miller | Peter DeGroote |

*Also includes three members whose names can not be listed (one male and two females).

Regional Representatives:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Northeast: | Julie Morrissey, Dan Maiden |
| Southeast: | Robert Bryant |
| North Central: | Morris Floyd, Jan Olson |
| South Central: | Jay McCarty, Mike Merrifield, Sue Bock |
| Western: | Fritz Schultz, Gloria Soliz, Jim Scurlock |

Voices from the Turquoise Path*

One more time. In this season when we celebrate the Holy One in our midst, let us hear once again Celie and Shug's conversation about God from Alice Walker's The Color Purple and feel once again the blessing that it imparts.

She say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God...

Then she say: Tell me what your God look like, Celie.

Aw naw, I say. I'm too shame. Nobody ever ast me this before, so I'm sort of took by surprise. Besides, when I think about it, it don't seem quite right. But it all I got. I decide to stick up for him, just to see what Shug say.

Okay, I say. He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted.

Blue eyes? she ast.

Sort of bluish-gray. Cool. Big though. White lashes,

I say.

She laugh...

Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit.

It? I ast.

Yeah, It. God ain't a he or she, but a It.

Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found It.

* According to Native American lore the Turquoise Path is a place for dreams and visions—to be embraced by and to embrace the Holy in our lives.

Come out, come out wherever you are!

Interested in creative writing? We are looking for original poems, prose, stories, prayers, etc. dealing with lesbian and gay spirituality. Hopefully this material will be published this Spring in a "devotional" format for use by the Affirmation family and friends. Anonymous contributions are acceptable.

For information, call Randy at [REDACTED] or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Affirmation P.O. Box.

Spring National Meeting April 5-7, 1991

Join us at the Valley of the Moon!

Nestled in the beauty of California wine country and a favorite haunt of novelist Jack London, Valley of the Moon offers magnificent opportunities for recreation and play. The retreat center features lodge-style sleeping quarters, great food, beautiful acres of woodlands and of course the modern conveniences of electricity and indoor plumbing.

Mark your calendars now — more details later.

Newsletter Deadlines for 1991

| | <i>Submission Deadline</i> | <i>Publication Deadline</i> |
|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| SPRING | Feb. 22, 1991 | March 15, 1991 |
| SUMMER | May 3, 1991 | May 24, 1991 |
| FALL | August 1, 1991 | August 24, 1991 |
| WINTER | November 1, 1991 | November 22, 1991 |

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Affirmation Newsletter
PO Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

*But if the child inside would lead us,
innocence; there'd be no war
We'd be travelers on an earthship;
We'd be children on a star!*

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE AFFIRMATION FAMILY

*May your holy days be blessed,
Your holidays, merry and gay.*



Affirmation Pledge Commitment

I want to be part of Affirmation's expanding ministry to and among gay men and lesbians.
You can count on me for the following support:

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$_____ (please specify)

You can expect my contribution:

☐ annually ☐ quarterly ☐ monthly

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